

Language Learning Strategy Preferences of Asian EFL Learners

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Abstract

Responding to the controversies in the results of past studies concerning the effect of nationality/ethnicity on using language learning strategies, this study adopts Oxford's (1990) strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) to report Iranian male college level EFL learners' pattern of strategy use and compare it with other Asian EFL learners' strategy use pattern. This comparison might hopefully enhance scholars' understanding about the role of nationality/ethnicity in learners' choice and use of strategies and would also add to the literature in the field. As such, the results of the study revealed that the Iranian participants are medium strategy users ($M = 3.31$) and resembled many other Asian background EFL learners. Descriptive statistics, multivariate analysis of the variances (MANOVA) and follow-up post-hoc comparison tests used in this investigation showed that the participants perceived using metacognitive ($M = 3.79$) and social ($M = 3.82$) categories of strategies at a high level and significantly ($p < .05$) higher than other categories of the SILL. Memory ($M = 2.89$) and affective ($M = 2.75$) categories of strategies turned out to be least favored by them and were less significantly ($p < .05$) used than other categories listed in SILL. The results of individual strategy item analysis were in conformity with the above results. Based on the noticeable similarities discovered in the strategy use pattern of Asian EFL learners, the author suggested some guidelines for teachers and policy makers working in Asian EFL context.

Keywords: learning strategies; nationality; Asian background English learners; EFL; strategy use pattern

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1. Introduction

Cognitive Psychology, emerging in the 1960's, changed language researchers' way of thinking about language learning strategies (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). Oxford and Schramm (2007, p. 47) define second language learner strategy from the psychological perspective as “a specific plan, action, behavior, step, or technique that individual learners use, with some degree of consciousness, to improve their progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language.” Oxford (1999) states that, “such strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language and are tools for greater learner autonomy” (P. 518). Research in the field started with strategies of “Good Language Learners” followed by research on “Less Successful Language Learners”. As by-product of such endeavor, several classification frameworks of LLSs were outlined by experts in the field such as Rubin (1981), Bialystok (1978), O'Mally and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990). From 1980 up to date, it has been the concern of many researchers to investigate what variables are related to the learner's choice and use of learner strategies and how strong their influences are. Nationality has been one of these variables believed to affect learners' choice of strategies. For instance, Politzer and McGroarty (1985) in a pioneering effort to investigate the effect of nationality on LLSs found out that Asian students showed fewer of the strategies expected of “good” language learners than did Hispanic students. In terms of progress in English, however, the Asian learners made more progress than did their Hispanic counterparts.

The authors speculated, based on these results, that what constitute good strategies might be ethnocentric. Several studies have been conducted to explore the patterns of strategy use of Asian background language learners. Nevertheless, most of these projects have been executed in East and Southeast Asia (Oh, 1992; Bedell & Oxford, 1996; Park, 1997; Bremmer, 1999; Ok, 2003; Peacock & Ho, 2003; Yang, 2010) where the context of language learning is quite different from that of some other Asian countries such as Iran. Thus, more research should be conducted with English learners of other Asian nationality domains in order to give us a clear picture of the role of nationality/ethnicity in using LLSs. This study, in turn, aimed at discovering both similarities and differences between Iranian English learners and other Asian background EFL learners in terms of their strategy use pattern. The purpose of doing such study, hence; could be summarized in the following research questions:

1. What is the strategy use pattern of Iranian English learners in terms of overall use of the SILL, and the application of SILL's six strategy categories?
2. With respect to 50 individual strategy items in the SILL, what are the most and least frequently used strategies of Iranian learners in this study?
3. How comparable are Iranian English learners with other Asian background EFL learners with regard to their strategy use pattern?

In the following section, the definition of LLSs and nationality/ethnicity as a variable will be addressed in some detail as pertinent to the topic under investigation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Learning Strategy: Definition

Many researchers have underscored the pivotal role of LLSs; however, they have differed in defining what a LLS is. Rubin (1987) regards LLSs as constructed by the learner to directly contribute to the development of their language system. Chamot (1993) defined LLSs as the behaviors and thought processes language learners apply to help them acquire, store, retrieve and use information within the target language. Ellis' (1994) definition of LLS reads as "an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language" (p.530). According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990) LLSs are specific ways of processing information and enhancing comprehension, learning or the retention of information. The difference in the definitions of LLSs could be traced to the different processes LLSs have been attached to by different researchers in the field during discreet periods of time. Some definitions reflect a greater emphasis of the role of LLSs on the processes of language learning than on language learning as a product. For instance, Oxford (1992/1993) defines LLSs as: "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. "Strategies are tools for self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability" (p.18).

2.2 Nationality/Ethnicity and Language Learning Strategy

Most probably, study on nationality as a factor that might influence learner's strategy choice began with efforts by Politzer and McGroarty (1985) who found out that Asian students showed fewer of the strategies expected of "good" language learners than did Hispanic students. Bedell and Oxford (1996) studied the strategies used by 353 mainland Chinese EFL university students; they revealed that compensation strategies were the highest-ranking category. They found that this was also true with Chinese students studying in Taiwan and the US. The Puerto Rican and Egyptian students, in contrast, reported a moderate use of compensation strategies. Based on their findings, the authors argued that the higher use of compensation strategies might be typical of Asian students. They also reported low use of memory strategies by Asian students.

Bremner (1999) studied a group of Hong Kong university students, the findings suggested that compensation and metacognitive strategies were their most favored ones, while affective and memory strategies were the least frequently used strategies by these English learners. Meanwhile, the participants perceived themselves as medium strategy users. Griffiths and Parr (2000) reported finding that European students reported using language

learning strategies more frequently than language learners of other nationalities. They reported that European students showed working at a significantly higher level than learners of other nationalities. Mochizuki's (1999) study on Japanese EFL students reported infrequent use of memory strategies by this group of Japanese learners. Peacock and Ho (2003) studied the strategy use of 1006 Hong Kong university students; they argued that the participants were medium strategy users with compensation category of strategies as the most frequently used one followed by cognitive, metacognitive and social strategy categories. Memory and affective strategies were reported as the least frequently used ones.

A more recent study by Riazi and Rahimi (2005) on Iranian university students' LLS use pattern gained similar result, that is, Iranian students are medium strategy users. They perceived using memory strategies less frequently than other strategies, while, metacognitive category of strategies was the most frequently used one. Another Iranian study (Nikoopour, Amini, & Kashefi, 2011) revealed that, in terms of overall strategy use, Iranian EFL learners are, in general, moderate strategy users with metacognitive strategies being their most and memory strategies being their least favored ones. Chang (2009) used SILL to study Taiwanese college level English learners' strategy use pattern in both EFL and ESL contexts. While memory and affective categories were least favored by his participants, cognitive and social strategy categories were reportedly their most frequently used ones which is rather in contrast with some other EFL studies in the field regarding the high use of cognitive and social strategies by the participants in his study.

Yang (2010) studied the strategy use pattern of 288 Korean university students. The findings indicated that Korean university students used a medium range of strategies. Compensation strategies were used most frequently whereas memory strategies were used least frequently by this group of Korean EFL learners. The authors in most of the studies presented above used Oxford's SILL for their investigation and their study results generally suggest that nationality plays a significant role in learner's choice and use of strategies. In sum, the results of the above mentioned studies can be summarized as: 1) the Asian EFL participants perceived themselves as medium strategy users, 2) metacognitive and compensation strategies were reportedly the most frequently used strategies while affective and memory strategies were the least frequently used strategies of these Asian EFL learners, and 3) European learners reported higher use of LLSs compared to other nationalities. In this study, Iranian mail college level English learners' strategy use pattern will be explored and compared to that of other Asian background EFL learners'. Other backgrounds such as European nationality are beyond the scope of this study and will not be discussed here.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 157 Iranian male college level English learners that were randomly selected based on a two-step cluster sampling procedure. As the author was doing the main study in two countries, the participants of the study were partly selected from different branches of a reputable language institute located in Tehran, the capital city of Iran, and partly from a Malaysian language center in Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia. They had been posited to their appropriate levels of language proficiency based on their language institutes' placement tests. The authors also used the participants' self-rated proficiency report to assure the students were righteously placed to their groups of low, intermediate and advanced English learners as the proficiency factor was another variable in the main project (discussed elsewhere). All participants were studying English at their private language centers to improve their four language skills for both communicative and academic purposes. Their age range was between 22 and 28.

3.2 Instrumentation

Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or SILL (version seven) used in this study is a 50-item survey. It is applied to discover the frequency of language learner strategies used by second or foreign language learners in learning English. A rating scale from 1 to 5 is used as the indication of the numbers for the likert scale as number one meaning 'never or almost never true of me', and number 5 standing for 'always or almost always true of me'. The SILL's alpha co-efficient for reliability is 0.92 (Griffiths, 2007) and content validity is 0.99 (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). This inventory consists of six major categories each containing a number of items. The categories include: 1) Memory (nine items: 1-9); 2) Cognitive (14 items: 10-23); 3) Compensation (six items: 24-29); 4) Metacognitive (nine items: 30-38); 5) Affective (six items: 39-44); and 6) Social (six items: 45-50). The SILL is used to conduct surveys for the purpose of summarizing results for a group by means of statistical treatment and objectively diagnosing the problem of individual students (Oxford, 1990). The overall average indicates how often learners tend to use the language learning strategy.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) along with the authors' equivalent Persian translation of the SILL was used to elicit information on language learning strategies of the participants. To further ensure the reliability of the inventory, it was administered to 33 subjects randomly selected from those who had participated in the study, with a time interval of two weeks. The test-retest reliability index turned out to be 0.81. The students' performance on the questionnaires were scored and analyzed for exploring their pattern of strategy use. Data analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were utilized to find out the participants' mean score over the SILL, and in the 50 individual items of strategies included in SILL as well as in the six categories of strategies in SILL. A multivariate analysis of the variances (MANOVA) was used to see if there were significant differences between the categories of strategies as perceived to be used by the participants in the study. Accordingly, Follow-up post-hoc comparison tests were adopted to determine where exactly the differences lied between the means of strategy categories.

4. Results and Discussion

The participants in this study gained the overall strategy mean score of 3.31 which indicates they are medium strategy users as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Overall Use of Learning Strategies by the Iranian Participants

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
SILL	157	1.8	4.6	3.317	.5088

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics Categories of SILL

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Social	157	2.0	5.0	3.821	.6996
Metacognitive	157	1.3	5.0	3.793	.7033
Compensation	157	1.8	5.0	3.421	.7042
Cognitive	157	1.4	4.6	3.261	.6076
Memory	157	1.1	4.6	2.896	.6640
Affective	157	1.5	4.8	2.756	.6169

Table 2 shows descriptive information on the learners' mean scores over SILL six strategy categories. The table presents the categories from the most favored category to the least favored one as perceived to be used by the participants.

The results of the multivariate analysis of variances test (MANOVA) indicate that there are significant differences ($F(2, 152) = 120.48, p = .000 < .05$) between the mean scores of the six categories of strategies in SILL. Follow-up post-hoc comparison tests (Table 3) were also obtained to let us discern where exactly the differences lie.

Table 3
Post-Hoc Scheffe Comparison Tests for the Categories of the SILL

(I) SILL	(J) SILL	Mean Difference			95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
		(I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Cognitive	Memory	.365*	.043	.000	.237	.493
	Affective	.505*	.052	.000	.349	.662
	Memory	.525*	.059	.000	.349	.702
Compensation	Cognitive	.160*	.050	.027	.010	.311
	Affective	.666*	.059	.000	.490	.842
	Memory	.897*	.049	.000	.749	1.044
Metacognitive n	Cognitive Compensatio	.531*	.047	.000	.393	.670
	Affective	.371*	.063	.000	.183	.559
	Memory	1.037*	.053	.000	.878	1.196
Social n	Memory	.925*	.057	.000	.754	1.095
	Cognitive Compensatio	.559*	.051	.000	.407	.712
	Affective	.399*	.064	.000	.209	.589
	Affective	1.065*	.064	.000	.875	1.255

Note. *. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Descriptive Statistics (Table 2), and the results of post-hoc comparison tests (Table 3) indicate that social ($M = 3.82, SD = .70$) and metacognitive ($M = 3.79, SD = .70$) categories of strategies were significantly ($p = .000 < .05$) used higher than the other categories in the SILL. Affective category ($M = 2.76, SD = .61$) as well as memory category of strategies ($M = 2.90, SD = .66$) were used significantly lower ($p < .05$) than the other

categories in SILL. At the middle of this hierarchy, that is, after social and metacognitive and before memory and social categories are located compensation ($M= 3.42$, $SD= .70$) and cognitive ($M= 3.26$, $SD = .60$) categories which were significantly different ($p < .05$) from the other categories on one hand and only slightly different from each other in a significant way ($p = .027 < .05$) on the other hand. Obviously, based on the results displayed in Table 2, social and metacognitive categories fall within a high range of use ($M=$ above 3.49), while the other categories are in a medium range of use ($M=$ between 2.5 and 3.49).

Accordingly, of the SILL's 50 strategy items, the author has looked at the participants' seven most and least frequently used individual strategies which are discussed along with the strategy categories analysis further in this section. Prior to that, Table 4, and Table 5 are presented in the following part as showing the participants' most and least favored individual strategies respectively.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics Seven Most Frequently Used Strategies by Iranian Participants

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Q49	157	1	5	4.35	.869
Q32	157	1	5	4.24	.878
Q38	157	1	5	4.06	1.004
Q33	157	2	5	4.04	.960
Q48	157	1	5	4.02	1.022
Q29	157	1	5	4.01	.971
Q45	157	1	5	3.92	1.056

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics Seven Least Frequently Used Strategies by Iranian Participants

	<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Q6	157	1	5	2.73	1.447
Q17	157	1	5	2.70	1.248
Q44	157	1	5	2.45	1.288
Q5	157	2	5	2.24	1.157
Q41	157	1	5	2.21	1.177
Q7	157	1	5	1.96	1.106
Q43	157	0	5	1.61	1.066

When we compare the results of the present study with those of other studies (Chang, 1991; Oh, 1992; Yang, 1994; Park, 1997; Bremmer, 1999; Wharton, 2000; Peacock & Ho, 2003; Chang, 2009), it turns out that Asian EFL learners show similar patterns on at least two aspects: 1) Asian EFL learners are generally moderate users of language learning strategies, 2) Affective strategies (at least those listed in SILL) are least favored by the

majority of Asian EFL learners.

The results of the present study showed that metacognitive strategies were most favored by the Iranian participants. Similarly, in several other studies with Asian EFL participants, including Iranian ones, the same result was obtained (Oh, 1992; Park, 1997; Riazi & Rahimi, 2005) to name a few. This is in conformity with the results gained on individual strategy items; among the 50 items in the SILL, item 32 (M =4.24) (I pay attention when someone is speaking English), item 33 (M =4.04) (I try to find out how to be better learner of English), and item 38 (M =4.06) (I think about my progress in learning English) as metacognitive strategies show the highest mean scores as perceived to be used by Iranian language learners in the study. High use of metacognitive strategies by EFL learners including Iranian English learners could be linked to the lack of natural English use in settings where they are living or learning English. Additionally, in some cultures such as Iranian culture implicit instruction is not regarded as teaching and learners expect to be fed with explicit rules even in the presence of namely communicative approaches of teaching in their English classes. As a result, they can hardly pick up the target language as they heavily rely on their conscious skills and strategies (metacognitive behavior) for learning the target language. Thus, it is not unusual to observe high use of metacognitive strategies by Iranian learners of English, who strive to learn the language in spite of the existence of mainly grammar-based approaches of teaching English in Many Iranian public or private language institutes that provoke mainly conscious processes on the aspects of Iranian language learners' strategy use.

The participants in this study also resemble many Asian EFL participants in other studies (reviewed above) with respect to their low frequent use of affective and memory strategies. Affective strategies, in fact, enable learners to control their emotions, attitudes, and motivations in language learning processes. Lower use of affective strategies by the participants of this study could be due to their difficulty in managing their emotions and anxiety to use the target language especially in the form of a presentation or a lecture or even a simple talk in front of other students in the class. Their fear of using the target language might relate to the fact that English is not used beyond the walls of the classrooms especially in spoken forms and as a result, Iranian learners hardly build up second language identity required for taking roles, interacting in English and many other activities which involve using the target language for self-expression. Another likely explanation for the lower use of affective strategies is that there are a few unusual strategy items in the SILL that might not gain a high score even by good language learners which, in turn, might affect the total category mean score. For instance, strategy items 41, 43, and 44 respectively shown up as "I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English" or "I write down my feelings in a language learning diary" or "I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English" were least favored by the participants in this study and gained the lowest mean

scores ($M = 2.21$, 1.61 and 2.45 respectively) among almost all the SILL strategy items.

Likewise, memory strategies were least favored by Iranian participants in this study as well as by other Asian participants in several other studies (Oh, 1992; Peacock & Ho, 2003; Chang, 2009) to name a few. Memory strategies, based on Oxford's (1990) definition, enable learners to create mental linkages, group, associate, elaborate and place new words into a context. They also let learners make connections between images and sounds. Some strategies in this category enable learners to use keywords and represent sounds in memory, while some other memory strategies entail reviewing which enables students to do structured reviewing. Finally, employing action using physical response is another technique in this category. One explanation for the lower use of these strategies as Oxford (1990) claims is that language students rarely report using memory strategies, which may also be the case in the present study. Oxford believes that language learners might not be aware of how often they actually employ memory strategies. It is likely that the participants in the present study just underestimate how often they use memory strategies. Another likely explanation for the lower use of memory strategies according to Riazi and Rahimi (2005) might be due to the fact that traditional rote memorization strategies that Asian learners once were reported to have preferred might differ from the specific memory strategies reported in Oxford's (1990) SILL. This interpretation is in conformity with the results gained on individual strategy item analysis. Of 50 items in the SILL, item 5 (I use rhymes to remember new English words, $M = 2.24$) and item 7 (I physically act out new English words, $M = 1.96$) are memory strategy items which gained the lowest mean scores among almost all the SILL items.

The participants in this study reported using compensation ($M = 3.42$) and cognitive (3.26) categories of strategies at a medium level. They used these categories significantly higher than affective and memory categories but they used them significantly lower than metacognitive and social categories of strategies. As related to the application of compensation strategy category, the results of this study resemble the results of some other studies with Asian EFL learners (including Iranian students) who reportedly applied compensation strategies at a medium level (Green, 91; Oh, 92; Park, 97; Riazi & Rahimi, 2005; Chang, 2009; Nikoopour et al., 2011), but are in contrast with the results gained in other studies indicating a high use of compensation strategies by Asian EFL learners (Chang, 1991; Yang, 1994; Bedell & Oxford, 1996; Bremner, 99; Peacock & Ho, 2003; Yang, 2010) to name a few. On the whole, participants in the present study applied compensation strategies at an acceptable rate ($M = 3.42$) and significantly higher than affective, memory, and cognitive strategies. Of the SILL's 50 individual strategy items, too, item 29 (*If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing*, $M = 4.01$) as a compensation strategy was among the top seven strategies most favored by the participants in the study. Higher use of compensation strategies as Bedell and Oxford (1996) argued is typical of Asian English learners.

Compensation strategies enable learners to guess intelligently using linguistic cues and other cues. Some of these strategies enable learners to overcome limitations in speaking and writing; they switch to their mother tongue, get help, use mime or gesture, avoid communication partially or totally, select the topic, adjust or approximate the message, coin words, and use circumlocution or synonyms (Oxford, 1990). High use of compensation strategies usually (but not always) characterizes the learners who struggle with lower competence. In fact, what has been long emphasized in relation to a compensation strategy definition by many people in the field is its connection to a deficit in the learner's language competence. However, as Cohen (2007) state learners can be highly strategic in an area where they actually do not have a problem or deficit. Iranian students like other Asian EFL learners may frequently use compensation strategies to both compensate for the gap in their target language knowledge and act strategically to make progress in terms of language learning.

Another area of great similarity between the present study and several other studies with Asian background English learners including Iranian ones (Chang, 1991; Yang, 1994; Bedell & Oxford, 1996; Bremmer, 1999; Park, 1997; Peacock & Ho, 2003; Riazi & Rahimi, 2005; Chang, 2009; Yang, 2010; Nikoopour et al., 2011) is in moderate use of cognitive strategies. In the present study Iranian learners perceived using cognitive strategies ($M = 3.26$) at a medium level and significantly ($p < .05$) higher than affective and memory strategies. Oxford (1990) regards cognitive strategies to be responsible for understanding and producing the target language. They are central to learning as they involve direct manipulation of the target language, thus, failure or poor performance in language learning can be linked to low use of these strategies. Thus, it can be concluded that strategies such as repeating, practicing English sounds, finding patterns, analyzing, reasoning, and summarizing the target language information are used by Asian background English learners at an average rate. In other words, average use of cognitive strategies is typical of Asian EFL learners including Iranian EFL learners.

Finally, Iranian learners in this study perceived themselves as high users of social strategies ($M = 3.82$). With this regard, the results gained by the present study support the results of only a few similar studies (Wharton, 2000; Chang, 2009) with Asian Non-Iranian language learners as the participants. Iranian English learners reported a high use of social strategies in some similar projects. For instance, Kafipour, Jabbari, Soori, and Shokrpour, (2011) studied the strategy use pattern of 156 Iranian post graduate students majoring in art and science and found that their participants applied social strategies at a high level. In another study on Iranian English learners, Sadighi and Zarafshan (2006) also reported high use of social strategies by their participants.

Nonetheless, the results of the present study are dissimilar to the results obtained in several other studies (Chang, 1991; Oh, 92; Yang, 1994; Bedell & Oxford, 1996; Park, 97; Bremmer, 99; Peacock & Ho, 2003; Yang,

2010), in which non-Iranian Asian background English learners reported to use social strategies at a medium range. Also, in a few studies Asian English learners perceived themselves as low users of social strategies. For instance, Noguchi (1991) administered SILL to Japanese university students and revealed that they were moderate strategy users, overall, and used all strategy categories between low to medium ranges. Social category turned out to be least favored among this group of Japanese students.

Based on Oxford's (1990) definition, social strategies help students learn through interaction with others. Strategies in this category mainly entail asking questions for correction or clarification, cooperating with other proficient language users, and finally developing cultural understanding. Logically, one might expect low use of social strategies by EFL learners, specifically by Iranian ones as Iran is an EFL context where learners do not have abundant opportunities to communicate the target language in out of the classroom settings. However, the results of the study contradict the notion. A glance over individual social strategies reveals that except for the strategy item 46 (I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk) which is normally more applicable in settings where there are native and non-native users of the target language outside the classroom, other items included in this category could be employed both in and out of the classroom. For instance, item 45 (If I don't understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down and say it again), item 48 (I ask for help from others who can speak English well) and item 49 (I ask questions in English) gained the highest mean scores ($M= 3.94$, 4.02 , and 4.35 respectively) among almost all the SILL's items and obviously were perceived to be employed most frequently by the participants of this study in classroom settings where their teachers and more knowledgeable peers are essential sources for correction, clarification, and verification. Thus it could be argued that social strategies included in SILL might not truly measure learners' social strategy use pattern.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The results of individual strategy item analysis accord with the results gained on category analysis; the most frequently used items by the participants belonged to their most favored strategy categories, i.e. social and metacognitive strategy categories while the items which gained the lowest mean scores belonged to their least favored categories, i.e. memory and affective categories. On comparison, the study results indicate that Iranian English learners as a big nationality show striking similarities in terms of strategy use pattern to other Asian EFL learners. Like other Asian EFL learners, they perceive themselves as medium strategy users ($M= 3.33$) regarding the overall use of SILL. Similar to many other Asian EFL learners, Iranian students favor metacognitive category of strategies the most ($M= 3.79$) and memory ($M= 2.89$) and affective ($M= 2.75$) strategy categories the least regarding the six strategy categories in Oxford's (1990) SILL. Additionally, Iranian participants in this study resemble many other Asian background EFL

learners with regard to moderate use of cognitive category of strategies ($M=3.26$). Compensation category of strategies is the domain where studies show contradictory results, with some indicating a high use of these strategies by Asian EFL learners, and some reporting moderate use of this category of strategies by Asian background English learners.

This study reports moderate use of compensation category of strategies ($M=3.42$) by Iranian EFL learners. However, unlike many other Asian background EFL learners, Iranian participants in this study perceived themselves as high users of social category of strategies ($M=3.82$). The finding of the study highlights the role of ethnicity in learners' choice and use of strategies. The difference, in turn, might be due to the unique thinking styles of Iranian learners. The difference in the strategy use pattern between Iranian and other Asian background learners might also come in the light with reference to Naraghi Zadeh (2004) as arguing that Iranian students mix all the learning orientations. She believes it to be rooted in the Iranian learning culture. This might relate to their specific philosophy of life indicating that a human being can only be perfect, when he studies all of the sciences and arts. This might also be due to the influence of the French educational system that Iran adopted in the last century. In such a system the students have to study all subjects. Thus, the author of this study believes that language instructors could achieve more fruitful outcomes in their language classes if they adjusted their teaching styles to their learners' particular thinking styles and strategies.

Considering the existing contradiction in the results gained by past studies in relation to the role of ethnicity in learners' choice of strategies, the author suggests that the researchers in the field avoid broad generalizations such as "Asian EFL learners highly use compensation strategies" without thoroughly comparing the results of their own studies with the results gained in other studies. In fact, what might be appealing to the researchers in the field is a pressing need to investigate other sociocultural factors (such as sociopolitical conditions of a particular society) that interact with the nationality/ethnicity variable to influence learner's strategy use preferences.

Realizing the striking similarities between Iranian and other Asian background EFL learners with regard to their strategy use pattern can give policy makers and language teachers' fruitful insights when planning a lesson or designing a syllabus in Asian EFL contexts. For instance, high use of metacognitive strategies indicates that Asian learners of English are very conscious of their learning process when they are learning and using English in a context where there are not many ready-made situations for communicative use of English. High use of metacognitive strategies by Asian EFL learners are also linked to learners' autonomy and success in language learning as suggested by some researchers such as Griffiths (2008) in the field. She regards metacognition as a guide for choosing, monitoring, combining and evaluating approaches for learning languages without which learners have no direction. She also regards metacognitive behavior of the learner as 'an essential element

of autonomy' which enables them to take charge of their learning even in the absence of appropriate teaching schedules and programs.

Revolving around the low use of affective strategies by Asian EFL learners we realize that they experience a high level of anxiety when they use English both inside and outside their English classes. EFL learners' high level of anxiety when using the target language can relate to their less exposure to authentic and rich target language input in their surroundings. As such when planning a lesson in an Asian EFL context where immediate use of the language seems far removed outside the classroom, the following guidelines may help teachers to compensate for the lack of ready-made situations for communicative use of the target language by the students:

- Take class time to work on the activities that cannot be done as homework;
- Teach the students learning strategies that could be applied both in and outside the class;
- Use authentic language inputs which are culturally bound and motivating in order to boost interaction between peers and their level of enjoyment for learning the language;
- Assign the students a plethora of extra-class activities which involve them in active use of the target language outside the class, such as having them watch a movie and write a report for the class, write a journal on their learning progress, send emails to other peers and etc.;
- Encourage the students to form language communities and schedule regular activities;
- Help learners to find out more intrinsic factors for language learning;
- De-emphasize the role of language tests and emphasize genuine use of the language and interaction.
- Provide the students with appropriate and authentic materials that accord with their thinking styles and strategies.

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